

Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease

What is it?

Also known as “GERD” or “acid reflux,” gastroesophageal reflux disease is characterized most often by heartburn, which is caused by gastric acid entering the esophagus from the stomach. This acid reflux is thought to happen when a particular muscle at the top of the stomach, the LES, is “flexed” too long, or too often, allowing the flow of acid back into the esophagus.

Symptoms

The most common symptom of gastroesophageal reflux disease is heartburn, or acid indigestion. Heartburn is often described as a painful burning in the chest, neck, or throat. Other symptoms can include:

- ✓ A mild cough
- ✓ Difficulty breathing
- ✓ Difficulty swallowing

Diagnosis

Because the symptoms of gastroesophageal reflux disease often mimic other ailments, such as ulcers or gastritis, it is important to consult your physician for a diagnosis. In addition to listening carefully to your symptoms, and asking questions, your physician will likely perform imaging and/or lab tests to make a diagnosis. These tests may include a combination of the following:

- ✓ Upper GI: the patient swallows barium, a thick, chalky fluid, which allows the esophagus and stomach to be examined and evaluated via X-ray.
- ✓ Upper Endoscopy: a thin, flexible tube called an endoscope is guided into a patient’s esophagus, allowing the physician to examine the region.
- ✓ pH monitoring: the patient wears a small monitor for one or two days, during which time the monitor detects and records levels of acidity in the patient’s esophagus.
- ✓ Esophageal Manometry: this test allows a physician to look for abnormalities in the way a patient uses their esophageal muscles to swallow.

To gain an accurate diagnosis, it is important that you clearly and carefully describe your symptoms to your physician.



Treatments

Because gastroesophageal reflux disease can be caused by many factors, your physician will likely recommend a combination of the following to successfully reduce your symptoms:

- ✓ Smoking cessation
- ✓ Weight loss, if applicable
- ✓ Consuming less alcohol
- ✓ Limiting the consumption of certain foods and beverages, such as those containing tomatoes, citrus, alcohol, chocolate, or coffee.
- ✓ Eating smaller portions
- ✓ Avoid eating or drinking right before bed.

Your physician may also scrutinize the medications you are taking, as some of them may contribute to gastroesophageal reflux disease. He or she may also recommend an over-the-counter antacid to treat your heartburn symptoms.

Helpful Hints

- ✓ If there is a change in your symptoms, or if they worsen, let your physician know right away.
- ✓ If you’re unclear about a test, diagnosis, or any part of your treatment plan, please ask your physician. The more you know, the more successful your treatment plan will be!

Brought to you by the caring physicians at:

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